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SUBJECT: TIP ARRESTS AND PROSECUTIONS IN HCMC ON THE RISE, VICTIMS
HELPING TO RAISE AWARENESS

REF: HCMC 756 AND PREVIOUS

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11. Summary. The GVN continues make strides in arresting and prosecuting human traffickers in HCMC and prosecute those responsible for trafficking in persons, with two new investigations underway and a stiff sentence upheld at a trafficker's appeals trial in October. Anti-TIP NGO AFESIP says cooperation with authorities is improving and response times on TIP leads are faster thanks to recent GVN efforts to step up anti-TIP work. A recently returned victim also shared her story with the press to warn others - a remarkable step in a country where the stigma of being a victim and the shame it brings to one's family is still a powerful bar to creating greater public awareness of the dangers of trafficking-in-persons. End Summary.

Arrest of Sex Trafficker

12. (SBU) On October 1, HCMC press reported the arrest of Truong Nguyen for trafficking women to Malaysia. A suspected accomplice, Ms. Nguyen Thi Mai Trang, was released due to her pregnancy. Lieutenant Colonel Le Thanh Kiem of HCMC's anti-TIP police (Unit PC-14) said they caught Nguyen "red-handed" when he attempted to traffic another woman to Malaysia at the end of September. LTC Kiem said the investigation is ongoing, so few details are publicly available at the moment.

13. (SBU) Press reports say Trang promised an 18 year old "NTGP" (the victim's name was withheld from the press) a high paying job at a restaurant in Singapore in exchange for a USD 200 "finder's fee." Upon arriving in Singapore on January 25, NTGP was taken across the border to Malaysia, where she said two men picked her up, drove her to their home and forced her to work as a prostitute 3-5 times per day for approximately USD 80 to 140 per customer. NTGP said the two men kept all her earnings and threatened to starve her and sell her to another country if her family did not pay a ransom. LTC Kiem said NTGP's family initially informed their local ward police of her plight and called the Indonesian Consulate to ask for assistance after receiving no word from the authorities. In February 2008, NTGP's family paid a USD 2000 ransom to a Malaysian man for her freedom. The Indonesian Consulate cooperated with the Vietnamese Embassy to rescue NTGP and, upon arriving home, NTGP and her family reported the details of her story directly to PC-14, who immediately began the investigation that led to Nguyen and Trang's arrest.

14. (SBU) LTC Kiem said PC-14 is currently investigating another case involving three victims from the Mekong Delta province of Dong Thap who were trafficked to Macau to work as prostitutes. One of the victims managed to call home, and PC-14 contacted the

Vietnamese Consulate in Hong Kong to coordinate their return. A Vietnamese consul traveled to Macau to meet the women and help them escape back to Vietnam. The police have arrested four suspects but reported difficulties in obtaining cooperation from Macau authorities.

Heavy Sentences Stand for Traffickers, NGO Gives Kudos to Police

15. (SBU) Successful prosecutions of traffickers are also on the rise. On October 13, the HCMC Appeals Court rejected an appeal from Ms. Hua Hue Muoi, who was sentenced to 10 years in prison for the charge of human trafficking in a court hearing on June 10. Muoi also received a fine of USD 1,180, was ordered to pay USD 885 compensation to the victims, and had USD \$2,855 confiscated when she was arrested. Her accomplice, Quang Chi Phat, who did not lodge an appeal, was sentenced to 12 years for a similar conviction. Ms. Muoi lured 28 local women to Malaysia by posing as a marriage broker from May 2005 to May 2006, and sold her victims to Malaysian traffickers for between USD 1,500-2,000. Kiem said they initially investigated 10 potential trafficking suspects, but Vietnamese prosecutors could only build solid cases for Muoi and Phat.

16. (SBU) LTC Kiem said PC-14 cooperated with anti-TIP NGO AFESIP (Acting for Women in Distressing Situations) to track down the women trafficked by Muoi and Phat. AFESIP then used their network of NGO contacts in Malaysia to coordinate the victims' rescue with Malaysian authorities. AFESIP Country Coordinator Cao Minh Quyen said cooperation between the NGO, PC-14 and PA-18 (HCMC's immigration police) is improving, and police are responding more quickly on information requests. Quyen said their network of NGOs in Malaysia, Thailand and Cambodia pass on information about Vietnamese sex workers, which AFESIP Vietnam then asks police to verify. "Three years ago, the authorities would take up to 12 to 14 months to respond" said Quyen, while today the NGO receives verification within 30 days. Quyen attributed the improved response time to a new GVN interagency

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circular (Ministry of Public Security Inter-Agency Circular #3) issued in May that requires verification requests to be processed within 30-45 days as well as the Prime Minister's Decision No. 17 in January urging law enforcement agencies to step up their anti-TIP efforts.

Victim Shares Her Story

17. (SBU) In addition to bringing their cases to the police, TIP victims are also sharing their stories with the press to warn others of the potential dangers in seeking overseas employment or marriage, a brave move in a country where most victims are afraid to come forward because they face societal and familial discrimination. A 22-year-old Vietnamese girl named "TTG" (whose name was withheld from the press at her request) shared her story about being duped to work as a commercial sex worker in Indonesia with Thanh Nien (Youth) newspaper on October 1.

18. (SBU) In the article TTG said she met "T" (whose name was also withheld at TTG's request due to threats she received from T) two months ago, and after a short time, T offered TTG an opportunity to go to Indonesia and work at her friend's garment shop. To convince TTG and her family, T invited them to her house and let them talk on the phone to a Vietnamese girl named "My" living in Indonesia. My painted a rosy picture of her work in Indonesia for TTG and her family, noting how her overseas earnings had made her family very well off in Vietnam. Several days later, T made TTG an even more attractive offer -- marriage to a wealthy Indonesian man. Towards this end, TTG was persuaded into borrowing USD 2,300 to undergo breast augmentation surgery.

19. (SBU) After the operation, T contacted an Indonesian man named Hengky Lukman who helped TTG with her visa procedures. When she arrived in Indonesia on August 28, TTG said two men picked her up and took her to an apartment building, then forced her to "entertain" customers at a neighboring hotel. TTG said

she saw more than 100 girls from Indonesia, Thailand, Philippines, China, and other countries working for this commercial trafficking ring. TTG said dozens of girls were required to stand in line waiting to be selected by men visiting the hotel bar. TTG says although she had to "serve" many customers, she only received two poor meals every day and the boss, Lukman, did not give her any money. Over a week later, TTG was able to contact her family in Vietnam, who in turn contacted the Indonesian Consulate in HCMC for help. The Consulate staff asked the family to contact the Vietnamese Embassy in Indonesia, and the Vietnamese Embassy coordinated with the Indonesian police to rescue TTG on September 16. The news report said that HCMC police have been seeking T for questioning, but have been unable to locate her thus far.

Comment

110. (SBU) The steady uptick in Vietnamese press reports on human trafficking is a direct result of the GVN's concerted efforts to improve cooperation and coordination among law enforcement agencies, which demonstrates their continued commitment to tackle trafficking-in-persons from all angles. AFESIP's comments are a signal things are moving forward, but much work remains to be done. In many cases, families are still paying ransoms in order to get their loved ones returned and often police either cannot or will not act until victims come home and step forward. TTG's story in Thanh Nien is an example of how victims are increasingly willing to step forward, despite the social stigma they may face. TTG said her decision came from her desire to warn to others, showing her understanding of the powerful voice victims can have in raising public awareness.
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